

“The message I have for you this morning, I'll be honest with you, it's not the one I wanted to preach. Someday we're going to mass class, that's the message I want to preach.

But not today.

This is the message, this is what I'm, I guess I want to call this, this is a reminder message.

I want to talk about one of the most basic things in Christianity.

And that is prayer.

We need to be a praying church.

Well, preacher, I think we are.

Well, let's see if we are or not.

Because a praying church consists of praying people.

This is just building. You all are the church.

All right.

We are going to look at some scriptures from the 12th chapter of Acts.

I have been here a lot here lately, but I keep finding more and more that I believe we need to dig a little deeper in.

This is Acts chapter 12 beginning in verse number 1.

I'm going to read five verses for our scripture reading this morning.

Acts chapter 12 beginning in verse number 1.

Now, about that time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands to beck certain of the[...]
“Where it says to beck certain of the church, that is talking about persecuting the believers.

All right?

And he killed James, the brother of John, with a sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to further take Peter also. Then were the days of unleavened bread.

The days of unleavened bread.

That is the feast of Passover.

And when it apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four quantorians of soldiers to keep him, intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

Peter, therefore, was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church, by the Church, unto God, for him.

All right?

Now, when that first verse says that Herod the King began to vet the Church, he began to persecute the believers.

That's the new living translation of that verse, to persecute the believers.

And what he started out doing was just things to irritate them. He would fine them for being believers. Some of them he would throw into jail for a short period of time as a punishment for being a believer."

"He would raid their houses and just ransack them, all because they were believers. And the herod was an enemy of the church.

The herod was not the enemy.

He was just being used by the enemy.

You only have one enemy, by the way, and it's not flesh and blood, according to the Bible.

You only have one.

And the enemy was using herod, and as happens, herod was persecuting, herod was out in sin, living that sinful life, and as he lived it, he became more and more emboldened. He went from just throwing people in prison and finding them and ransacking houses to taking one of a believer's life. The Bible says he went and killed James, the brother of John, with a sword.

And what that means is he was beheaded.

Whenever you read that, that someone was killed with a sword that was beheaded.

There were four types of death that was approved by the Jews, four types of punishment.

And this is one of them."

"That's exactly why he did it, because when you see when he did it, the Bible says he pleased the Jews. And then when he saw how much the Jews were pleased by what he did, he took Peter.

He put him in prison because of the feast of unleavened bread, because of Passover.

You need to understand that Passover lasts seven days.

The first day and the last day, even to now in Israel, are the holy days.

There's no work on the first day, there's no work on the last day.

So Peter was not just in prison overnight.

He was in prison for seven days, seven nights.

He was there.

And he, Herod captured him and held him because he knew he could not violate Passover among the Jews without upsetting them. And he's trying to please them. He's trying to make them happy.

So Peter sits in prison all this time. He has four different sets of guards guarding him in this time. He's chained up in the prison.

He's locked behind the gates of the prison.

He's there.”

“It really looks like he's going to follow in the foot steps of James and be a martyr for the cause of Christ.

But the fifth verse says, The prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Prayer was made without ceasing by the church.

Praying to God by him.

Now, I want to share some scripture with you as far as what God says about his house, the church.

Isaiah said this first, in Isaiah 56 and 7, he says, For mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. Matthew, Mark, and Luke repeat basically that same scripture. Matthew says, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer.

Mark says, My house shall be called of all nations.

All people is what it means, the house of prayer.

Luke says, My house is the house of prayer. And John doesn't say it, but John yet alludes to it.

So all of the gospel writers bring back the words of Isaiah.

So obviously, what they're trying to get us to understand is that God wants this house, his house, to be a house of prayer.

“Now, you've all heard the saying, prayer changes things.

It's on bumper stickers.

It's on Bible bookmarks.

You may have a magnet on your refrigerator with that on.

Prayer changes things.

And that's exactly right.

I believe we can all agree with that statement, that prayer changes things. But not only does prayer change things, things, it also changes people.

Prayer changes people.

Not just the people you are praying for, but it also can change the people who are doing the praying.

It can. And it does.

It will renew those during the praying.

It will refresh those during the praying.

It will encourage those during the praying. In church, you become aware of the presence and of the power of Almighty God and the power of prayer.

Prayer changes things.

Prayer changes people.

Prayer changes churches.

Prayer changes churches.

And that's what I want to talk about this morning for just a brief time.

I want us to look at that very thing.

And I want to look at three different types of prayer.

The first one is very, very common.”

“That is the fervent prayer.

Our script really says that prayer was made without ceasing by the church.

And if I can break that down for you, it kind of means that they were praying when they were all together. And they had to do that in secret because of Herod and because of the things they were up against. They prayed when they were all together.

And then when they separated, they went home and prayed with their families about this whole situation. And then when they were done praying with their families, they then entered into their closet, and they shut the door, and they prayed in that manner also. When it says they prayed without ceasing, it means they were faithful in their prayer, they were fervent in their prayer, and they believed in what they were praying for.

And folks, that is what it means when they're talking about praying without ceasing. I know you can't spend your entire day and week in your prayer closet, but folks, you can be in an attitude of prayer, whether you're saying the word or not. It can be on your mind.”

“You all know how it is to get something on your mind. When you get to this point in life, you get something on your mind, and you see 1 a.m., and 2 a.m., and 3 a.m. Yeah.

Amen. Amen.

Because you got that on your mind, you know.

We need to get off our mind and give it to God, and then sleep soundly and perfectly. But I know it is not easy sometimes, but we need to understand, this idea of fervent prayer means going beyond what's normal.

It means really getting serious.

Now, I've talked about this a lot in the past.

I'm going to remind you of it.

There is a difference between saying a prayer and praying a prayer.

A huge difference.

And when we move from saying prayers to praying prayers, things begin to happen, and things begin to take place. When the whole church comes together and begins to pray, well, that's one thing that's happened. James 5 and 16 talks about the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man.

It makes a difference.

You've heard those prayers.

They are energetic.

They are passionate.”

“They are not filled with these and vows.

They are filled with heartfelt words. They are filled with just what is in your heart, and you get hold of God that way. We need to know that there are people in the church who know how to have a fervent prayer.

If you've got something wrong in your life, and you've got a need in your life, you don't want the people saying a prayer.

You want people praying a prayer.

Because that's the one that gets hold of God. That's the one that breaks through all the junk in the world. That's the one that the devil, the enemy, can't stand, because a fervent prayer will send him running.

You just say a prayer, he knows the Bible better than most of the Christians know the Bible.

Quit quoting scripture, and this should leave in your heart.

Begin to get hold of God. Begin to pray these fervent prayers, the effectual prayers, the prayers that make a difference.

And when the church would come together and pray these prayers, folks, things will change. If you want change in the world, get the church all on the same page.

“Quit praying.

Quit worrying about division. Quit worrying about what this one thinks and that one thinks.

You know, quit, quit.

This side needs to know who's sitting on this side, and that side needs to know who's sitting on this side.

Okay?

Sometimes we go to church with people and don't even know who's on each side because we get so used to our little group.

Now, I love y'all.

You know that.

But y'all sit in the same seat every week.

We do. I do.

I sit right over there every week.

I'm thinking about sitting over there for a while.

Just a warning, guys. It may happen.

I don't know.

You know?

But I'm always over.

Why?

Because we're all preachers of habit.

And we get in the habit of praying.

And that is just when it's a habit, it doesn't do anything.

Well, preachers, we're praying.

Yeah, but are you? Are you?

Are you getting hold of God when you pray?"

"Well, I'm also busy.

Therein lies the issue.

God is not a 911 God.

Yeah, we're treating that way.

Man, when things go wrong, I got to pray.

As God would just open up the eyes for me.

Or we could just drive through and say, Hey, Lord, real quick, I need this.

I get to go.

An effectual, fervent prayer.

Man, we need some people to know how to pray those prayers.

We need some people to know how to pray a focused prayer.

Focused prayer.

Because we're real good about praying.

You know how we pray for people?

Lord, bless them all.

You know what's wrong with them.

Bless them all.

Straighten up that bunch. You know who I'm talking about.

Bless them all.

We're praying in generality.

Who's them all?

God knows.

God wants you to pray specific.

Do you know what this verse, I just read, you said?

The church, without ceasing, made prayers unto God for him."

"For him.

Specifically for Peter.

You know, he was praying for James.

He's done in heaven. He's got it good right now.

You know? He's in heaven with God.

So, they made prayers specifically for Peter.

Specifically.

Lord, save him.

Lord, spare him.

Lord, spare him.

Don't let him meet the same ends that James met.

He was willing to.

He was ready to die for the cause of Christ, but the church began to pray with a focused prayer.

They didn't stop with this.

Well, Lord, you know Peter's in a bad way.

You know what he means, so we're going to leave that up to you.

The Bible says we have not because we ask not, specifically. Listen, you will not go into a restaurant, and when the waiter comes up to you, you have never once had to.

Would you bring me whatever you think I would have?

Have you? No!

You order exactly what you want.

Are you telling me, God's got to mean you?

I'm telling you, you need to get specific with God, and you need to ask God for the need in your life.

Preacher, he knows.

Yeah, but you need to tell[...]"

"You need to tell him exactly what your need is, and you need to believe that God will hear your prayer, and God will answer your prayer.

We need some fervent prayers.

We need some focused prayers, and we need some faithful prayers.

What do you mean by faithful prayers?

I mean you keep asking until it happens.

You don't give up, and you don't give in.

You don't take no for an answer, because God is faithful, if He's nothing at all.

God is faithful.

God is faithful. And if we would be half as faithful to God as God is to us.

God is faithful to me when I don't deserve His faithfulness. We need to be faithful to God. We need to be that people who will fall on our faith and fall on our faith before God and continually cry out to God until God sends the answer.

Matthew 21 and 22 says, all things whatsoever you ask in prayer, you shall receive.

That is God's promise.

And yet, how many times..."

"I don't want to see your hands, but how many times have you prayed and then said, Well, I guess it's just not in God's will. You only asked me once, twice, three times on a good day.

A day, I said, not a week, not a month. A day.

We need faithful prayer.

1 John 5, 14 and 15, it says, And this is the confidence...

Do you know what confidence means?

Do you know what confidence is?

Confidence is something you truly, truly believe. I am confident.

I am confident of this.

I know this to be true.

And this is the confidence that we have in Him.

Who in God?

That if we will ask anything according to His will...

Ooh.

That one hurt.

I got to ask according to God's will?

What about my will? God, don't you care what I want?

I am very careful when I speak for God, but I'm going to tell you...

Because his will is the one that matters.

I know what I want, and y'all know what you want."

"But if you ever stop to ask God, God, is my will and your will the same will? Are we on the same page? Bless God if we would get on the same page.

We could change the world.

But we're too busy dividing one another and looking for ways to divide, and letting the enemy come in, and he comes in with just, you know, just irritating.

It's like Herod did.

Sin escalates, folks.

Sin keeps getting bigger and worse.

What started out with just, you know, aggravating people ended up taking a man's life. Kill James.

Sin escalates.

Let me finish this verse.

But if you ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of him.

We have not because we ask not.

We ask and receive not.

But we don't ask the right way.

The Bible says, King James says, we ask of this.

Why?

That we might consume it on our own lust.

Another verse, another translation says, our own self.

Our will and not his. Our will and not his.”

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<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/prayer/id1652234925?i=1000728700350&r=1123>

This material may be protected by copyright“You've got three types of prayer.

All right?

Fervent, focused, and faithful.

Now, I want to look real quick at what happened.

What happened when you pray like that?

What happened when you embrace this type of praying?

Well, the first thing that happens are supernatural things.

Oh, I don't like that word, Richard.

Supernatural.

That sounds like a, you know, that sounds like all that, that sounds like that supernatural stuff, and that's scary.

Well, understand what it means, sir. Understand what it means.

That means God does things that aren't natural.

God does things this way, and that's the way the world thinks they ought to be done. God accomplishes the things the world can't accomplish on its own.

Those are the supernatural things I'm talking about.

When the church began to pray, they prayed without ceasing. They were fervent, and they were focused because they prayed for him, and they were faithful in their prayers because they did it all week, seven days. He's in there, and they prayed every day for seven days."

"Not giving up, not giving, and not taking note for an act, but faithfully praying.

God spare Peter's life.

The supernatural things.

The Bible says in the seventh verse, that he showed up in the jailhouse and woke Peter up.

Now, I don't know.

You see, when I read the Bible, I let my mind go sometimes.

How did he wake him up?

How did the angel wake Peter up?

Because he got two guards setting beside him.

He's chained to two guards, a guard on the right and a guard on the left. And if I have this correct, Peter's got a chain on his wrist that's chained to another Roman guard. He's got a chain on this wrist that's chained to yet another Roman guard that's sitting beside him.

And here's an angel shows up in the middle of the night and wakes Peter up.

How did he wake him up?

Peter, honey, time to get up.

I don't think so.

I don't know, though.

How did he smack him?

I don't know.”

“But I know enough to know Peter wasn't sure if this is real or not.

And I'll show you what the Bible says in this little bit.

Peter wasn't sure if this is real or not.

But the angel woke him up.

I prayed and I prayed that God would send an angel to wake us up, to wake our nation up, to wake our world up, because we need to wake up, church.

We need to understand that life is not what God designed it to be. And if the church would begin to pray, and the church would begin to seek God, and the church would begin to be the church that God designed it to be, that's what will change the world.

And that's the only thing that's going to change the world.

Angels showed up.

They woke him up.

Hallelujah, they woke him up.

The last part of that seventh verse says, and change that law.

People said in this church, Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, and not this church, but many, many churches bound by change.

You can't see them.”

“I'm talking spirits of change. I'm talking things that hinder you, that hold you, that keep you from being everything God wants you to be, and the enemy has convinced you that that is your law in life.

We sing that song.

You're made for more. You are living below what God intends for you to live. Why?

Because you've got these chains.

You need an angel to touch you, and when the angel shook Peter, the chain fell off.

Supernatural things that only God can do.

But then what?

I said, Peter, son, get dressed.

Every one of y'all got out of bed this morning.

You got dressed.

Look in the mirror, make sure everything was like it ought to be, as close as you could get it anyway.

And come home.

And the last thing you did before you went out the house, if your house is like mine, is you put your shoes on. You're running around the house with them shoes on.

You don't sleep in your shoes.

Peter didn't either.

Why, again, did God make a point of saying 20 days until Peter finds home?

Because he's telling Peter just like he's telling us."

"Church, it's time God's people put on the whole armor. Not a piece of it, but all of it. And you know what the last thing he says about your shoes?

Bind your feet with the Word of God. Bind your souls with the Word of God, the power of peace in itself.

Church, we must begin to do that. Have our speech dog with a preparation of the gospel of peace.

That means you are taking the gospel with you.

You are ready to tell Jesus to anybody that will stop and listen and pray, believing that God will save them and God will change their hearts. He said, get ready, son, because you are leaving this prison.

You are going to be set free.

I'm going to make you whole, and you are going to go on and touch hearts and change lives for the glory of God. That's the calling in Peter's life. That's the calling in our lives.

He said, get your shoes on, son.

We got stuff to do, and we got places to go.

And James had fell off, Angel showed up, and he gets to the big iron gate to the city."

"And all of a sudden, it just...

What if Pittsburg showed up and did that right here in this congregation?

Would it scare you?

Would it just blow your mind?

Don't you tell somebody what you think.

I don't know, but nobody can believe this.

I don't even know if God's here.

But what we do gets bigger than this.

I tell these people up here, what we do is bigger than we are.

And if you are up here, up here, for any other reason than to serve God, get off of here.

If you out there are coming for any other reason to serve God, you're in the wrong place because we are living about serving God, and it being bigger than us, because God is bigger than us. We can make our plans, but until God shows up and does something we can't do, you don't even know if God is here, all right?

What do you mean, Richard?

Glad you asked.

This building you're setting in is bigger than us.”

“Do you realize where we're at?

We're in the heart of Pittsburg, Illinois.

Population, I think, by 600 or something. You know how many people we had here last Sunday?

All of Pittsburg was hit broke!

I can take you to a lot bigger cities, to a lot smaller congregations. Are you ragging?

Yes, on God.

Because what we're doing shouldn't be done. It shouldn't be possible.

This building you're setting in shouldn't have ever happened, and yet it did.

God still shows up.

God still shows He can do what we don't think we can do.

That's the thing, folks, and why? Because people begin to pray, and people preach in your way.

I told you this is a reminder message.

I'm reminding you of what you already know.

But how is that important?

Oh, I am so glad you asked. I told you earlier, my wife and I have been married 45 years.

She is a saint.

She had put up with me for 45 years.

You all have no idea.

I have lived for all these years.

My kids are grown.

I mean, they're both in their 40s.

That makes me 50 ish, ish."

"Nothing stirs my heart more than what my kids tell me.

Dad, I love you.

Reminds me of what I already know. Now, I got six grand-babies.

Oh, Lord, help me. The oldest one turned 18 yesterday.

My only granddaughter turns 10 today.

Yes, we're broke at our house right now.

But we'll be broke and eat ramen noodles from now on. It's okay. Oh, and those grand-kids, they were still on my lap.

They say, Papa, I love you.

Give them what they want, Grammy.

I don't care no more.

I know that, but it's so good to be reminded.

Do you understand what I'm talking about?

I know you know how to pray, but you need to be reminded of the power of prayer and what can happen when God's people pray.

I want to rest before I get through this verse.

All right.

All right.

Where are we at?

Oh, yeah, the gates are open.

None of this, none of those things can be explained other than by the power of God.

They're not natural.

Stains don't just fall off."

“We're going to say, an angel don't just appear, and city gates don't just open on their own.

It can't be explained that it happened on their own.

It only happened by the power of Almighty God.

Let me read this verse to you. Ooh, I like this verse.

2 Chronicles 7, 14.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, God said. When you pray, seek my face, and turn from your wicked ways, get your heart right with God, and then God will, you'll hear from God. He says, then will I turn from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land.

16 says, for now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there forever. What house?

This house.

The church house, God's house, the church.

That my name may be there forever, and my eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually.

You know what perpetually means?

From now on, until eternity and beyond.

Folks, that's what it's about.

Great things happen when God's people pray together.”

“Great things happen when the church prays. But unfortunately, the age we live in, some churches have replaced prayer with programs.

I'm not against all the programs we have, because we have a lot of them.

They cannot take the place of the prayer.

The churches have replaced it for feeding.

We don't bring you in here to entertain you.

We want you to like the music, but if you're not getting the message in the music, you're missing it.

You're missing what it's about, the songs we sing.

Man, that last song, that's why I was so confused.

I heard Bruce practice it.

I thought, he hadn't sung it. We're still standing up here. I'm setting on go, and we're thinking, that was the song that's supposed to be sung.

That's an old, old song.

Man, didn't it feel good to sing it?

Then it feels good to sing. Then it feels good to just stand up and sing as one voice.

And the worst thing, some churches have taken on the attitude of anything.”

“I've done this deserve good enough. I deserve the very best we have.

I deserve what we do to be done with excellence.

God deserved it.

He gave the very best for me and for you and his son.

That died not because of his sins, but because of mine, because of my mistakes, because of everything I had done wrong, everything I will do wrong.

Fairness Lives translates into Fairness Church.

Now, there are two kinds of sin. The sins of commission, the things you do that are wrong, and the sins of omission.

You know, that's all from God, that ain't from me.

Supernatural things, I'm going to get over here. Next thing is, surprise me.

When you pray, and when you seek God, he will surprise you.

Now, Herod killed James.

And his plan was to kill Peter.

And I've told you twice, I don't know if you've caught it or not, but I've told you twice what the church was praying for.

Lord, despair Peter's life.”

“Despair his life. I don't know if they were asking for him to be set free. They were asking for him to not be killed.

Life in prison is better than him having to die.

At least we can visit him, and maybe we can talk to him, and we can encourage him, and maybe he can encourage us. Lord, just don't let him kill him.

Life in prison is okay.

Well, God heard their prayer and He answered.

And not only did He spare his life, He set him free.

And when He showed up at their door, they were a little shocked.

They were surprised.

Ephesians 3 and 20 says, Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above, exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

And I have pondered that verse, I have prayed over that verse, because God doesn't, He does.

But I wondered, does He grasp what I think?

Does He grasp the enormity of the things I think about?

I know He does.

How many times in your life has God...

I had a thing, I don't know what their purpose was.

You believe that?"

"I got a story I haven't heard before.

Back in last year of Old May, when I got sick, they run a bunch of tests and found things that I didn't even know were there. And I had a thing that was serious or not serious, right?

And my doctor said, hey, we need to go get this checked.

It could be bad, you know, and everything else.

And I said, okay.

So I go get it checked, and I come back to her, and she said, well, I guess the first report was wrong, but this one says it's not there.

And I said, well, maybe it was, and now it isn't.

Her dad was a preacher.

Sometimes, God surprises you. Because once I found out what it was, yes, I began to pray.

Because it had already been down that road once, then it won't go down again.

Then they check it, and it's not there.

It's not just me, there's a lot of people in this building, church.

There's a lot of people in this building.

And God surprises us. Because my God always goes over and above. Over and above.

Surprising things.

“The third thing, saving things.

Prayer saves things.

Prayer makes the difference.

The seventeenth verse.

Peter told all those in the house how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.

Saved him.

He's delivered.

He's set free.

Saved from death.

And able to go on according to God's plan.

God's got such a plan for your life.

He's waiting on you to get on board.

Well, how do we get on board?

Pray. Pray. Pray.

I'm done. I'm not done, but I'm quitting.

If you forget everything else, you remember these last two statements I want to make.

If you are here this morning and saved, and you know you're saved, it's because somebody prayed for you.

You're here this morning, and you're not safe. You're here because somebody right now is praying for you.

They're praying for you to come to know this man named Jesus.”

“And if they are the people I trust they're going to be, they're not going to put faith in you to get saved.

And I know, you want to believe you're alone.

You want to quit this praying stuff.

But man, you ain't not happy.

I remember the days of misery. I remember them well.

And that Sunday morning, I went to church with no intention of getting into this Jesus munch.

I sat where you guys are sitting. And about this time in the Serbs, something began to fall all over me like I had never experienced before in my life.

Because there was somebody praying for me. He's saying, that boy needs Jesus.

He needs Jesus.

His wife needs to rededicate her life.

They need Jesus.

Somebody's praying for you right now in this congregation, because you know you need Jesus.

And all you want is to forever get going.

You know what?

What you feel right now, it will go away for a little while, but it's coming back.

It's coming back.

Stand with me.